

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L PRAGUE 3453

USIA FOR IEU

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: SPOP, ECON, CZ
SUBJECT: POPULATION PROBLEMS IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA

1. THE NUMBER OF BIRTHS IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA IS DECLINING AT A TIME WHEN THE PARTY IS CALLING FOR ADDITIONS TO THE WORK FORCE, A CZECHOSLOVAK DEMOGRAPHER RECENTLY TOLD THE PAO. HE ATTRIBUTED THE DOWNWARD POPULATION CURVE (10,000 LESS BIRTHS THIS YEAR THAN LAST) TO A NUMBER OF FACTORS WORKING AGAINST THE GOVERNMENT'S GOAL OF 2.5 CHILDREN PER FAMILY. FIRST, DIVORCE RATES IN MAJOR CITIES LIKE PRAGUE, BRATISLAVA, AND OSTRAVA ALMOST EQUAL MARRIAGE RATES, HE SAID, AND ONLY STRONGLY CATHOLIC REGIONS SUCH AS SOUTHERN MORAVIA AND RURAL SLOVAKIA KEEP THE NATIONAL RATION AT 3.5-4 MARRIAGES TO ONE DIVORCE.

2. THE SOCIAL SCIENTIST, WHO HAD RECENTLY ATTENDED A WEEK-LONG HIGH-LEVEL CONFERENCE DEVOTED TO THE COUNTRY'S POPULATION-WORK FORCE PROBLEMS, SAID OTHER FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO THE CURRENT POPULATION PROBLEM ARE THE LONG WAIT FOR HOUSING FOR YOUNG MARRIEDS (5-15 YEARS FOR A MODEST APARTMENT), A SHORTAGE OF 80,000 PLACES IN CZECHOSLOVAK NURSERIES AND CHILD CARE CENTERS FOR WORKING AND OTHER MOTHERS, AND AN AVERAGE OF THREE DAYS IN A HOSPITAL AND THEN TAKE THEIR CHILDREN HOME, SOMETIMES WHEN THEY
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COULD
USE CONTINUING MEDICAL CARE. FINALLY, CZECHOSLOVAKIA'S ONCE PROGRESSIVE FAMILY ALLOWANCES PROGRAM FOR MOTHERS AND FAMILIES HAS NOT BEEN ADJUSTED TO THE UPWARD SPIRAL OF WORLDWIDE INFLATION OVER THE LAST DECADE, AND AN ECONOMICS MINISTRY OFFICIAL AT THE CONFERENCE SAID NO FUNDS WOULD BE FORTHCOMING IN THE CURRENT CZECHOSLOVAK BUDGET TO CORRECT THIS.

3. COMMENT: DEVELOPING THE SIZE AND SKILLS OF ITS WORKFORCE IS A CONTINUAL PROBLEM FOR CZECHOSLOVAKIA. IF THESE STATISTICS, PRESENTED IN A CONVERSATION, ARE ANYTHING NEAR CORRECT, THE PROBLEM WILL BE COMPOUNDED, NOT RESOLVED, IN THE IMMEDIATE YEARS AHEAD. MOREOVER, THE SOURCE SAID HIS OWN RESEARCH SHOWED 17 PERCENT OF PRAGUE FAMILIES TO BE FATHERLESS, LARGELY THROUGH DIVORCE, AND THAT THE CHILDREN OF MANY SUCH FAMILIES, INSTEAD OF BECOMING "CONTRIBUTORS TO THE BUILDING OF SOCIALIST SOCIETY," WERE A DRAIN ON ITS ALREADY OVEREXTENDED SOCIAL WELFARE SERVICES FOR THEIR NEED OF COUNSELING, JOB TRAINING, ETC.
BYRNE

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